

# The Light of the Gospel

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2 Corinthians 4:3-6

We used to live in a small town in North Carolina. Where we were was pretty far away from any major highways so it was kind of a local running joke that if someone asked you how to get to such-and-such a place, like say Charlotte, or the zoo, the common answer would be, “Well, you can’t get there from here.”

Well, before we can jump into today’s passage, I actually need to take you to another passage that’s going to get us to where we’re going a lot easier.

Hold your place in 2 Corinthians 4 and turn back one chapter to chapter 3 and let’s look at verses 12-18.

*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Now at this point it would be really helpful to take a few steps back and view the story of redemption as a whole for a moment. We know that Adam sinned, and from that point on, everyone born after him is said to be “in Adam.” That is, we all were born with a sin nature that Adam had after he chose to rebel against God.

Adam was originally made in the image of God and walked with God in perfect and unbroken fellowship. But because of sin, that image was marred and we no longer perfectly reflect God’s image in the world which is what we were created to do.

What we all need is to be changed. We need to be transformed so that the image of God we reflect will reflect His glory once again.

In order to do that we need to understand the concept of verse 18, which says, “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*”

Now there’s so much that I could say, and so much that NEEDS to be said about this passage, I could preach a whole sermon just on this passage alone. But here’s what I want you to see for today’s purposes: It’s in beholding Christ, it’s in seeing His glory that changes sinners into a new creation, and also changes believers more and more into His likeness, the likeness of Christ, who is the perfect image of God. And that’s what God is doing. He’s taking sinners and transforming them into the likeness of His dear Son. That’s the gospel!

So now we're ready to look at today's passage. Turn back with me to chapter 4 in 2 Corinthians, and follow along with me as I read verses 3-6:

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ESV*

### **Main Point**

God saves people by opening their eyes to see the light of the glory of Jesus Christ.

There are 3 points I want to bring to your attention from this passage today concerning this.

1. Understand the state of unbelievers before conversion. (vv. 3-4)

This is actually something that all of us really need to grasp. If our mission is to make disciples, then we need to know what state unsaved people are in so that we understand exactly what they need. Let's look at verses 3 and 4:

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Back in chapter 3, we saw that there was a veil over the eyes of the Jews that caused their minds to be hardened and made them unable to see the hope that is revealed in the gospel. It also says that only through Christ is that veil taken away. So we see here in verse 3 that this veil, this hardness of mind which causes them not to be able to understand the truth, affects those who are perishing. But why?

Verse 4...because in their case the god of this world – who is the god of this world here? Paul is referring to Satan. He is the god (little "g") of this evil world's system – so the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.

Blinding them from what, though? What is it that Satan trying his best to keep them from seeing? It says, *to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Now I want you to get this. Let's start at the end of verse 4 and work backward.

- Christ is the perfect image of God. He is the goal. We need to be transformed into His likeness because He became what Adam didn't. He was victorious where Adam failed. He perfectly reflects God's glory in the world, which is what we were created to do. And so that's why becoming like Christ is the goal.
- Moving backward from there, we see that it is the *glory* of Christ that changes people and...

- That's the good news, the gospel. The glory of Christ is what is needed.
- But the glory of Christ by itself doesn't change us. It's seeing that glory. We need to see it with our spiritual eyes. We need to have our eyes open and see it, to see HIM, see Jesus! This means, among other things, that we need to grasp the truth, we need to understand and comprehend this spiritual truth of the glory of Christ in order for us to be transformed by it.
- So then naturally, this is what Satan is trying to *keep* us from seeing. He doesn't want you to see it because he knows that then you will be set free from his deception and his slavery.
- So what does he do? He blinds them. He keeps that veil over their eyes so that they cannot see the glory of Christ and thus be changed.

Have you ever had something that you know you have been looking at day after day after day but you never saw it? Until one day for whatever reason, you see it, and you say, "Huh! I never saw that before. Has that always been there?" That's what goes on with unbelievers. The gospel is right in front of them, and yet they don't see it because they're being blinded.

The really bad news is, sinners love the darkness and hate the light. Look at John 3:19-20:

*<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

In his book, "A Peculiar Glory," John Piper illustrates this very well. He says that we are blind, "not because we are helpless victims of blindness, but because we are lovers of blindness."<sup>1</sup>

This is the state of man before coming to Christ. As we see in the passage in John 3, he loves darkness rather than the light that has come into the world to save him. He doesn't want his works to be exposed. Therefore, he has no *desire* for the things of God, even when presented to him. He is blinded by his own love for wickedness. Piper continues, "We are not chained in a dark cell, longing to see the sunshine of God's glory. We love the cell, because sin and Satan have deceived us into seeing the drawings on the wall as the true glory and the sources of greatest pleasure. Our prison cell of darkness is not the bondage of external constraint but of internal preference. We have exchanged the glory of God for images (Romans 1:23). We love them. That is our blindness."<sup>2</sup>

As the Bible further explains, they are slaves of their own sin:

**Romans 6:17** <sup>17</sup> *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed*

**Romans 6:20** <sup>20</sup> *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper. *A Peculiar Glory*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

A slave is trapped. Unable to break free. And in this case, as we saw in John 3, they don't even *want* to be free because they love their sin.

Not only that, but they are unable to understand spiritual things unless God opens their eyes.

**1 Corinthians 2:14** <sup>14</sup> *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

So what can be done? And what is our responsibility? We find that in point number 2:

2. Know the God-ordained means that sets people free. (v. 5)

<sup>5</sup> *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

Now last week I stated this, and I don't want to spend a whole lot of time on it this morning, but today I want to show it to you in Scripture. If you remember last week I told you that it's the Word of God being proclaimed, and more specifically the gospel, that is the means, or the conduit, if you will, through which the power and grace of God comes to sinners to bring salvation. But it's also that same Word of God that is the means through which believers are continually changed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

But one thing Paul knows very well is that he, himself, cannot change anyone's heart. I can't change anyone's heart. You can't change anyone's heart. Salvation is a supernatural work, and to do that you need a supernatural God. For as it says in Psalm 3:8, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." That's why Paul says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves." He knows that unbelievers are blind. He knows that they are slaves to their sin. So he goes right to where the power is:

<sup>5</sup> *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord*

That one phrase, "Jesus Christ as Lord" is the gospel in capsule form. Basically what he's saying is, "I don't have the power to change people's hearts, but Jesus Christ does. Therefore, it is Him and His Lordship I proclaim."

**Romans 10:9-10** <sup>9</sup> *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* <sup>10</sup> *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

**Romans 10:13** <sup>13</sup> *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

So a person is saved when he is able to declare that Jesus is Lord over his life, and believe in his heart that God raised him from the dead. Paul says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But Paul also knows the problem with sinful man, that they *won't* call on the name of the Lord. Look what he says next:

**Romans 10:14** <sup>14</sup> *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*

So then a person must have faith and call on the name of the Lord to be saved, and that comes only through preaching. But preaching what?

**Romans 10:17** tells us specifically:

<sup>17</sup> *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

God imparts faith to our heart through the preaching of the Word of Christ, the gospel! We see the reason for this in Romans 1:16-17:

<sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it (the gospel) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it (in the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Which is another way of saying that the glory of Christ is revealed through the gospel and THAT is what has the power to save!

Remember what Satan is trying to keep them from seeing? He's trying to *keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*. Because he knows that is what saves.

Paul says, <sup>5</sup> *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

**1 Corinthians 3:5-7** <sup>5</sup> *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*

But if it's the gospel that saves, people have to see it. Their blindness must be lifted somehow. Ultimately, it is God that must open their eyes. Remember what Paul said in chapter 3, "only through Christ is (the veil) taken away." As it says in John 3:3, <sup>3</sup> *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* The Greek word for "see" means "to know; recognize, realize; to understand."<sup>3</sup> In other words, unless someone is first born again, he is completely unable to understand or recognize the truths of the kingdom of God.

So then not only is it through the preaching of the gospel that God's power comes to save, but it is also through the preaching of the gospel that God first opens blind eyes in order for it to save. And that leads us to our final point this morning.

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<sup>3</sup> James Strong. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 1605.

3. Trust in the work of God in bringing people to faith. (v. 6)

*<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

This is such an incredible verse! Look at this:

*<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness – this is a reference back to creation when God spoke into the darkness, “Let there be light,” and light instantly came flooding in, pushing back the darkness!*

That’s what God does! Remember...His Word is living and active. The gospel is still being spoken from His mouth today. And it carries the same power to bring light into darkness as it did at creation. It says, *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts* – that’s where the veil is that blinds us, as it says in chapter 3, verse 15.

We can trust God to accomplish this. God sends forth His Word, and opens blind eyes. And His Word never fails to accomplish what it was sent to do.

**Isaiah 55:10-11** says...

*<sup>10</sup> “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

God’s Word will ALWAYS accomplish what it was sent forth to accomplish!

Have you ever thought about why we pray for people to be saved? And what is it that we should be praying for?

I submit to you that the reason why we pray for our lost friends and loved ones is because we want God to intervene in their lives and to save them. To do what only He can do.

So then how should we pray for them Scripturally? What should we be praying for? The answer to that is found right here in this passage. We pray that God would open their blind eyes, that He would lift the veil that is over their heart. That He would shine in their hearts, into their darkness, and give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and that they would see Jesus and be saved!

The story goes about a pastor who heard a member of his congregation tell how she had repeatedly explained the gospel to another woman who simply did not get it, though apparently she wanted to. So finally she said to the woman, “You have a veil over your heart. And you need to pray that God will remove it.” A few weeks later the woman called, elated, as she explained

that she had gone to bed the night before perplexed, but when she awoke that morning everything was clear. The veil was gone forever.<sup>4</sup>

We're not responsible for the final outcome of bringing someone to salvation. Only God can do that. But we ARE responsible to proclaim the gospel to whom God brings into our lives, and we're responsible to go wherever God sends us. And we're responsible to pray. We do the preaching and the praying, and God does the saving and transforming. We can trust Him to do that.

And so we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and as we do, we trust in God to do what only He can do – open their eyes to see Jesus and be saved. When God speaks into the darkness of a lost sinner's heart and says, "Let there be light," that sinner comes alive with the light of truth and he is able to see the glory of God!

So God has shone in our hearts, to do what? *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

As we close this morning, I really want you to see this. Remember I said earlier that people in their unconverted state have no desire for God? They actually love their sins as we saw in John chapter 3? When God opens their eyes, what they see for the first time is the surpassing glory and beauty of Jesus Christ! They see the shining brilliance and splendor and radiance of who He is! They see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and they are irresistibly drawn to Him. And that knowledge, that intimate knowledge of His glory instantly changes them into a new person and they are forever changed! His glory outshines all the things of this world that previously held them captive.

Jesus is infinitely more satisfying than the temporary pleasures of sin.

Jesus is infinitely more beautiful than pornography.

Jesus is infinitely more radiant than fame and fortune.

Jesus is infinitely more glorious than worldly power and prestige.

As the song goes, "and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His gLory and grace."

Let's pray.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent. Hughes. *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 84-85.